



New Slope Style

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By: **Julie Dugdale**

Mt. Brighton brings Lindsey Vonn, upscale eats, innovative terrain, and fresh energy to Michigan skiers and riders.



Lindsey Vonn visits Mt. Brighton, Oct. 2013.

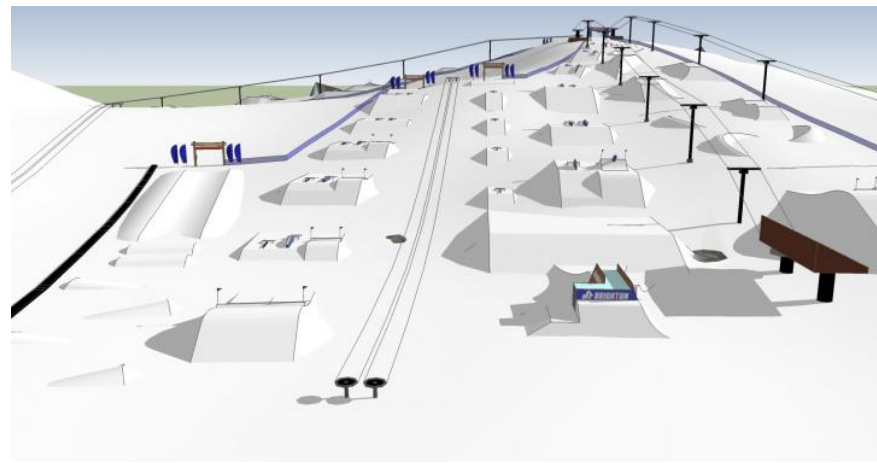
When Lindsey Vonn shows up in your 'hood, you know something big is afoot. In this case, you might say, something epic. The Olympic gold medalist and four-time World Cup ski racing champion made an appearance this fall at Mt. Brighton, one of two Midwest ski resorts recently acquired by Vail Resorts. And indeed, there are big things going on. The mountain has been one of the biggest attractions in Livingston County since 1960, and opens this month (be there for the December 14 Grand Re-Opening Celebration) with a \$10 million facelift, a renewed

community spirit, and a sense of pride that Vonn captured perfectly: “I grew up learning how to ski and being introduced to the sport of ski racing at a small ski hill in Minnesota, one very similar to Mt. Brighton. It never gets old for me to see the sparkle in a young skier’s eyes and talk to them about the sport of ski racing and how Mt. Brighton can be the foundation for their ski racing careers.”

Sure, Vonn’s visit was inspiring because of her star status and celebrity clout. But more than that, it was a sincere reminder that Mt. Brighton is the sort of place where world-class Olympic athletes like Vonn herself get their starts—or, in a turn-of-phrase Vail Resorts has coined for its Urban Ski Areas, a place “where epic begins.” Vonn said it best when she addressed the local crowd of aspiring ski racers: “A small hill is perfect to start out because you can get a lot of repetitions. You guys have a big advantage skiing at a smaller hill because you can get a lot more runs in than the other kids can at a big mountain. It takes them twice as long to take just as many runs. Use that as your advantage, get as many runs as you can, and you’ll be ready once you get to the mountains.”

It’s a brilliant strategy—one which Vail Resorts embraces wholeheartedly, and which helps explain the company’s expansion into the Midwest, where the modest ski areas are dwarfed in comparison to the company’s sprawling alpine resorts (four in Colorado, three in Lake Tahoe, and one in Park City, Utah). The purchase of urban ski properties such as Mt. Brighton and Afton Alps—its sister ski area outside of Minneapolis—reflects a deep understanding of ski culture and the widespread passion the sport breeds not only in big-mountain states, but across the country.

In fact, says Mt. Brighton's general manager, Taylor Ogilvie—the former GM of Vail Mountain's ski school who returned to his Midwestern roots to take the helm at the Michigan ski hill this past summer—more people identify themselves as skiers or snowboarders in Michigan than in the entire state of Colorado. According to the United States Ski and Snowboard Association (USSA), the Detroit area alone is responsible for 636,434 annual skier visits nationwide (a skier visit is a one-day visit to a ski resort by a single person). In other words, the



winter sports market is thriving in the middle of the country. “They’re small hills, but the enthusiasm is there,” Ogilvie says—and Vail Resorts has given Mt. Brighton a \$10 million edge on its competitors.

Skiers and snowboarders will benefit from a comprehensive overhaul undertaken throughout the summer and fall of 2013. The renovations will improve snow quality and quantity over 130 acres and 26 trails, upgrade dining options and lodge amenities, enhance ski school facilities, and create one of the most innovative terrain park systems in the state. First and foremost, the snowmaking equipment can now blanket the entire mountain—



Photos (top down): Terrain park rendering, cafeteria mid-construction summer of 2013, winter 2012-2013.

backside, too—with triple the capacity of the old machines.

Translation: deeper snow base, better snow surface, longer ski season (Mother Nature permitting, of course). Moreover, two new quad chairlifts and renovations to the existing lifts will whisk skiers and riders up the hill at a quicker pace, alleviating congested lift lines and getting anxious racers more time on the hill. And for the first time, Mt. Brighton is expanding its ski instruction offerings to children under six, which complements the new children's ski school center and the surface lifts that replace more difficult-to-navigate rope tows on beginner runs. These upgrades to the learning experience illustrate the company-wide devotion to cultivating an

early love of the sport.

If your kids have moved beyond the basics (or if you're the trickster of the family), head for the upgraded freestyle terrain: 40 new rails, boxes, and jumps spread amongst five distinct parks designed by Snow Park

Technologies, whose credentials include terrain parks as prestigious as the Winter X Games courses and those at many of Vail Resorts' expansive Western mountains.

Each sectioned-off area caters to different levels of skiers and riders with small, medium, large, or "progression" features (look for the new signature L-shaped feature boasting a lighted Mt. Brighton logo) so beginners can practice on manageable obstacles while more

advanced riders can up their game in more daring fashion. Area high school teams will continue to compete in snowboard cross on the state-of-the-art courses.

Whether you're an extreme athlete or a more leisurely cruiser, all mountain visitors have one thing in common after a day on the slopes: a ravenous appetite. Good news for Mt. Brighton patrons: The former aging Bauery Restaurant & Grill has been revitalized and will reopen this season—with a new food and beverage director—as the modernized Ore Creek Mountain Grill, named for the creek that runs south off of the mountain. With an expanded deck that affords an ideal spectator's view of skiers coming down the hill, the new sophisticated table-service restaurant will become a year-



Artist rendering of the exterior facade

round destination eatery as opposed to a perfunctory pit stop on the mountain—a place that locals can visit any night of the week for a nice dinner out. In the summer, for example, it will be the restaurant of choice to refuel after 18 holes on the Mt. Brighton golf course.

Enhanced dining options don't end there. The lodge makeover comes with a sleek new multi-station cafeteria that occupies the previously underutilized north end of the building. Hungry skiers can choose from a collection of eateries when they come in from the slopes, cozy up to the open fireplace, or take a load off in the new lounge seating with a warming beverage from Bruhn's Bar, named for former Mt. Brighton General Manager, Joe Bruhn. Upping the quality of the mountain's dining, both menu-wise and infrastructure-wise, makes the base area more attractive to skiers and riders looking for a true getaway experience and to parents waiting while their children finish on the hill for the day. "Vail is recognizing the potential that we all know Mt. Brighton has," says Tiffany Stewart, Marketing Manager and former Mt. Brighton snowboard instructor, "and is willing to put the money into realizing that potential."

But, officials note, just because the company is sinking millions into the mountain, it doesn't mean lift ticket prices will go up and the clientele will change. Michigan skiers now have the opportunity to purchase a Vail Resorts Epic Pass for unlimited access to not only Mt. Brighton, but also to 25 other iconic mountains in four countries, including Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge, and Keystone in Colorado; Heavenly, Northstar, and Kirkwood in Lake Tahoe; Canyons in Park City, Utah; and a host of world-renowned European resorts in Austria, Switzerland, and France. Simply put, it's a more-than-worthy investment: The Epic Pass gives skiers and riders an easy way

to ski all season locally and save money on their yearly ski trip out West.



Lindsey Vonn gathers Mt. Brighton locals for a group photo.

program of its kind in the industry, targeting loyal local patrons who make up the character of the generations-old ski hill. “We want to be as integrated into the community as possible and give back,” says Tracy Graf, Marketing Director for Urban Ski Areas at Vail Resorts, “because Mt. Brighton is really right there in the center of town, and the support for what we’re doing has been so generous and appreciated.”

Case in point: The mountain is making a concerted effort to maintain its local appeal through community-centric events. For starters, holiday-goers can get their reveling on at Mt. Brighton’s

Or, for those devoted exclusively to Michigan skiing, Mt. Brighton’s Preferred Program offers unrivaled value. Just register for the program (it’s free to sign up) to receive 10 percent off lift-ticket window rates for your first visit of the season (a total of \$33 to \$50) and \$10 off that rate—a savings of nearly 38 percent—on all return visits (all subsequent lift tickets are \$23 to \$40). It’s the only

New Year's Eve Extravaganza (December 31), complete with torchlight ski parade, live music, contests, prizes, swag, a fireworks display, and family-friendly celebrations. Then, area college students are invited to participate in the College Regionals Rail Jam (February 8–9), a two-day party featuring DJs, live music, competition prizes, swag, bar specials, and Terrain Park 101 sessions for those who aren't competing but want to learn. And Olympic fans won't want to miss Mt. Brighton's Olympic Watch Party (February 15–16) for big-screen viewings and other Olympic-themed festivities. This year, when Brighton area kids are out of school on their mid-winter break (February 21–25), they can practice their own future Olympic skills with kid- and family-focused ski lessons, contests, and a variety of entertainment.

And just maybe, when that Olympic Watch Party happens, the crowd of mini ski-racers who so warmly welcomed Lindsey Vonn to their hill in Southeast Michigan this fall will be there to cheer on the big-time star who started at a small-time mountain just like theirs. And they'll realize that this is where epic has always begun. "Being proud of the heritage is making people excited," Stewart says of the changes at Mt. Brighton. "The idea is not to take it over, but to lift it up, watch it become shiny and new and polished once again. There's very much a team feeling around here. It's about seeing the revival of something you've always loved."

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